

Lady Skollie Exhibition Reader

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Index

Artist Biography

Artist Interviews

- BBC World Service – *Lady Skollie discusses her use of symbolic fruit*2-3
(Transcript)
- Twin – *Lady Skollie Doesn't Play By Anybody's rules*.....4-10
(Images)
- Arthrob - *Run The World: In Conversation with Lady Skollie*.....11-14

(Audio Transcript)

BBC World Service – *Lady Skollie discusses the use of symbolic fruit in her work*

Interviewer:

Her works are an explosion of colour. She's an artist of the social media generation, and is often photographed along with her work.

Lady Skollie:

As a Khoisan coloured woman, I really like mark making, I think it's in my blood, I want to have something tangible that I created in the space.

The fruit is reminiscent of my coloured identity and very tied into sexual imagery – sexual dynamics, it also has a simple explanation, my mother was addicted to fruits and is now a diabetic. Sexual longing is translated into longing for fruit.

Interviewer:

That's when the sensuality of the work comes in.

LS:

Patriarchy runs so deep. Coming from south Africa with huge HIV statistics and also high numbers of rape. The silence is what keeps us in this loop. Humour is a useful way to openly discuss these issues.

Interviewer:

Why the name Lady Skollie?

LS:

An interplay between my feminine and masculine qualities. Skollie refers to a crook and also a person of colour. Now it has become fashionable with streetwear, so its about reclaiming a word that was used to repress us.

Lady Skollie Doesn't Play By Anybody's rules

[India Doyle](#)



South African artist [Lady Skollie](#) is a creative force to be reckoned with. Born in 1987 Lady Skollie (real name Laura Windvoege) is part of a new generation of artists in South Africa who are working within and against the digital sphere, and her work emanates a captivating and sensual energy across the range of mediums that she works with. Her most recent, and first solo, exhibition 'Lust Politics' at the [Tyburn Gallery](#) gave the city a riveting introduction to her provocative vision, and followed on from an acclaimed stint at Frieze last year. Twin caught up with Lady Skollie to talk working in South Africa, having a sense of humour and how women are going to lift each other up.

Growing up, were you always inclined to express yourself visually? How did your aesthetic develop?

When I was about 4 the Zorro franchise was really taking off in South Africa. I crawled underneath my mum's tables, beds, inside cupboards and

covered everything's underside with wax crayon Z's – all in different sizes. I remember being terrified that my mother would realize. So I suppose I have always expressed myself visually. When I was younger I thought that to be an artist you needed to paint realistically, and then I understood that my mark making did not need to be mimetic to be respected or convey a message. I took inspiration from Khoisan drawings because of my own Khoisan culture – as a coloured South African, and my work just became hard, fast, fluid.

Where did the name Lady Skollie come from?

Lady Skollie, for me, has been a lesson in identity. I've always had these disparate elements of my personality. Not long ago I wore cute 1950s dresses and had ringlets. Although I looked like a lady, inside I felt this urge to rail against authority and challenge the norm. I would talk about sex and paint little dicks on people's things. Lady Skollie was a performative thing; it was the space where these two things -masculinity and femininity – met.

Your work is striking and honest, drawing on personal experience. When you started did you ever worry that it wouldn't resonate with a wider audience?

No, this was never a worry really because I also draw on a range of socio-political issues, like rape, rape culture and plight of women, which are so prevalent within our wider society. They are issues which everyone, even those outside South Africa, should engage with.

It is time for people to feel uncomfortable, and for people to ask themselves very hard questions about how they relate to women, how they treat them, how they talk to them.



Your most recent exhibition was called Lust Politics. Do you think there is always a relationship between the visceral and the political?

Yes, from Monica Lewinsky to Marilyn Monroe to politicians blocking any means for women to have a more equal life or even just reproductive rights. I think there has always been a love hate relationship between politics and lust.

The names of your work are as powerful as the pieces themselves, which comes first when you start to create?

Usually the writing comes first. The works come separately and then I edit and chop to make the writing and the work correlate more.

You're wrestling with gender, sex and societal structures, why

did you want to investigate these ideas in ink and crayon?

I like the tension between a granny-like medium like watercolour and the garish, crayon drawings of sex. Depicting something as visceral as sex with a medium as soft and delicate as watercolour and childlike crayon is thrilling.

Why do you want to use humour in your work?

In South Africa humour is often used a vehicle for social change. People don't always want to listen if you are being serious. They would rather not listen to preaching and they don't want to hear about rape stats, HIV stats, etc. I think in some ways I'm pretty funny, so I use humour as a way of unwrapping serious issues in a palatable way – so that people will actually start thinking about change.



One of your pieces focusses on the ups and downs of competitive sisterhood. As you see it, how can women better enable each other?

Women need to engage with each other about issues; communication is

key to a united front, and we need one. At the moment, I definitely feel part of a zeitgeist and movement, especially in South Africa, where women are speaking up against feminine debasement and subjugation. Whether we make a social commentary with watercolours or whether we post an online status – that is what I'm part of.

How does Johannesburg influence your work?

J'burg pushes you to achieve things you might have only ever thought about; it's a city that's totally alive. My surroundings make a big impact on my work, and I think it's important to address issues around gender and sexuality because Johannesburg, and South Africa in general, is rife with sexual assaults and abuse. Art is an accessible way to bring up the narrative and I think we need to talk about it more and more and more.

Is now an exciting time to be an artist in South Africa?

Being an artist in South Africa right now is very important and very exciting. Finally the international market is catching on, and it's actually becoming a financially viable option. In J'burg there are a lot of new independent studios opening where people are reclaiming spaces, especially in Troyeville which was a huge centre of resistance during apartheid. Most of Troyeville is studios, huge buildings which were abandoned in the '70s and are now being taken over and are really cost-effective. People are now offering funded residencies. As a creative person it's a real privilege to have a space to make, without the worries of having to generate a huge income to sustain it.



What are your processes when working? Do you have a specific routine?

It's difficult to say, because my process entirely varies; I don't really have a specific routine when it comes to making work. However, usually I think about the image for a long time before making a single mark. Sometimes I write about the work before I create it, which allows me to have a context for it. I listen to a lot of hip hop in the studio; hip hop can take you places and it especially helps me with confidence.

Who are the artists that inspire you?

I am totally inspired by Athi Patra Ruga's ability to immerse you into his world without even trying. Also Robert Mapplethorpe, for his beautiful way of shocking and Mary Sibande for her sheer brilliance of identity dynamics.

What's next for you? And what are you most excited about?

I prefer not to talk about 'what's next'. I am in the present; I'm hard, fast, now. I don't play to anybody's rules. I am a rebellious person!

Tags: [artist](#), [interview](#), [Lady Skollie](#), [South Africa](#)

Run The World: In Conversation with Lady Skollie

September 23, 2016

Lady Skollie

By Keely Shanners

Reading Time: 5 minutes

Lady Skollie, a.k.a. Laura Windvogel, is doing much more than painting pawpaws and dicks. She is on a mission to rework the South African art world from the inside, to have her voice heard, to peel back the layers of social perception (perhaps, like peeling banana skin) to get at its political and historical meat. We sat down to talk to the art and activist polymath about identity, erotics, and running the world.

KEELY SHINNERS: Why choose the name Lady Skollie? Is there a type of performativity that comes with being an artist?

LADY SKOLLIE: Lady Skollie, for me, has always been a lesson in identity. I've always had these disparate elements of my personality. A couple of years ago, I had these ringlets and cute 1950s dresses. But inside, I always had this element of the obscene: wanting to be against authority, to challenge the norm. I looked like a little lady, but my mouth would be dirty. I would talk about sex and paint little dicks on people's things. Lady Skollie was a performative thing, you're right. The space where those two things were harmonious. It's quite volatile in my body and mind, the ways I perceive masculinity and femininity. So Lady Skollie was a character where those elements coincided.

KS: Now that you've been Lady Skollie for a while, do you feel like it's an empowering thing to have a character that you latch onto? Or do you feel it can be fragmenting?

LS: I think a bit of both. I love consistency. In the beginning, when I started being known as Lady Skollie, big galleries saw it as a “trendy” approach. Now, people ask me, “Do you still want to be listed as Lady Skollie or Laura Windvogel?” And I’m like, “Lady Skollie, obviously.” They have this thing in their minds, “How long will she be able to keep the character, keep the thing alive?” For me, it is about always tapping into either/or: the Lady bit or the Skollie bit. It releases me more. It gives me freedom in certain ways that Laura Windvogel wouldn’t.

KS: Your work deals with questions of erotics—how you relate to your body, how others relate to your body—but they’re not just about sex. Do you feel erotics can be a means of asking broader questions about politics, selfhood, relationships?



LS: My work is of a sexual nature, but I want to see it more as social commentary. In particular, I look at how women’s bodies are seen, these weird expectations of how women are allowed to talk about things. They want to see it as pawpaws and dicks. It’s cute. It’s easy to consume.

It’s a nice way to ‘break open conversation.’ That view is in direct correlation of how I used to see my own work. In the beginning of my career, I did a lot of that fast, vapid work with little thought and lots of shock factor. I thought that’s what my voice was. But now I understand that my opinion matters a lot. Why shouldn’t I make important commentary if my opinion has the ability to change people’s minds? Sometimes, people still want the 2013 Lady Skollie who was all into throwing sex parties. I still do that, it’s just not as empty. Now, I want to actually say stuff.

KS: You can look at bananas and pawpaws and say, ‘Oh, cute, it looks like a dick or a vagina.’ But you get into the history of those fruits as symbols of exploitation and colonization, consumption, and exotification.

LS: People want the easy thing to consume. Now, I'm in the stage where I'm actually really explaining to people what I'm trying to say. (People forget that I write. I'm like, 'Yes, I went to university too, guys. Don't just do dicks.') Before, I made a lot of assumptions about my audience and my work. I wasn't giving people the opportunity to vouch for what I do.

KS: Your work seems more explicitly personal than other visual artists. You're also a part of this strange phenomenon of the artist's personal life being able to be seen on Instagram, out in the open.

LS: It was a very conscious decision for my presence to be like that. I have a history of retail. It was downright bullshit, but it made me realise that everything is retail. When I worked in a gallery, artists would be there for opening night and never be there again. They would uphold this romantic notion of themselves being tortured, away in their space, and then they would complain that no one is buying their art. But if you're not there to convince people about your work, in your own voice, they can only take what they see. Especially in South Africa. I don't know why we have this Eurocentric way of perceiving art when it's not the same. People here don't have the expendable income to drop G's on something that's going to sit in their lounge. If someone's going to invest a lot of money into your work, you have to let them know who you are. That was important for me. I wanted to be attainable, in a way, so that my work was attainable. I do lay-buys, which ties into my commentary on coloured culture.

I worked in galleries. I know how the system works. I did the books for a gallery, guys. And it's not working in a South African way. It's not benefitting South African artists or the promotion of new gallery-goers. People don't give a fuck about art, actually. Are you telling me someone who can buy food is going to buy a painting instead? So it's all about giving people options. We're not Europe, and we're not America, thank fuck.

KS: You are a visual artist, a writer, a businesswoman, a radio show host. Why put energy into so many different layers of art and activism and not just funnel your energy into paintings?

LS: I'm gifted in more than that. It's like Wagner's 'Gesamtkunstwerk': everything works together, it is just one thing in the end. Besides, I like being the center of attention too much. I can't be in a room painting. I love speaking, and I'm only starting to understand now that my opinion actually matters.

KS: You've been working in the art world for a long time. How do you deal with an art world that is white, capitalist, patriarchal? Work from the outside?

LS: I work from the inside. That's why I worked at a gallery for a long time, so that I could understand stuff. It's also about asking the right questions and never thinking that a question is stupid. It's about setting parameters and talking about things like money from the get-go. It's knowing how you want to be perceived.

KS: If you were in charge of the art world, what would you do?

LS: I don't want to be in charge of the art world. I want to be in charge of *the world*.